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First Church In Green Bay Was Erected Near Home Of De Langlade On Stuart-St.

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THE Green Bay Historical society has been for sometime conducting a thorough examination of old records and documents, and consulting the recollections of the very early settlers of "The Bay" for the purpose of ascertaining as near as possible the site of the first Catholic church built in Green Bay, and of the old cemetery adjoining, with the purpose of marking their sites with suitable tablets.

The difficulties encountered in determining upon the site of the Chapel were considerable, and will be better appreciated when it is understood that the recollections of the old settlers who saw the old church, were not written until many years after the building itself had vanished, and all its environments had completely changed.

When the church was built about 1822 or 23, the whole region surrounding it, except for a few narrow clearings extending back from the river to Monroe-ave., and the old road winding along the river shore, was a forest, in all its native wildness. The chapel stood alone near the edge of the forest, the whitewashed picket fence of the old cemetery its only neighbor. There were no streets or blocks, or landmarks by which to judge of its relative position when these recollections were written. The boundaries of the private claims had never been surveyed or marked.

Grignon Property Nearby

The only houses in the vicinity were those of the de Langlades, at the foot of Stuart-st., and the Pierre Grignons at the foot of Crook-st. Gen. Ellis gives a graphic description of the situation as it existed when he came to "The Bay" in 1822. He says, "Charles de Langlade was a noted character in his day—the grandfather of the Grignon family of my time. He had occupied all the east side of Fox river, from Devil river up as high as Lawes point (foot of Porlier-st.) and dying left it to his grandchildren, the Grignons, who were in possession on my first arrival at "The Bay" in 1827. There were some half dozen houses along the river, below Lawe's point occupied by the family, and a new one just finished, which afterwards (1824) fell into Judge Arndt's hands; and an old one, much dilapidated, just at the north of the little slough below Arndt's house, (foot of Stuart-st.) only a part of which was still remaining, was said to have been the building occupied by Charles de Langlade, and in which he died. Pierre Grignon jr. was living in a house a few rods above (south) Arndt's old place. "And just above this house of Pierre Grignon jr., was the cemetery—picketed in, and under the control of the Catholics."

De Langlade Interred There

This old cemetery was used as a burial place by the French and English traders and habitants of La Bay for more than a century. Most of the noted men of Green Bay who died between about 1720 and 1830 were buried here. Agustin Grignon says "Sieur Agustin de Langlade died about 1771 at the age of about seventy-five years, and his remains were interred at the old cemetery at Green Bay." (Hist Col. vol. 3 p 228) In January 1800 or 1801 after an illness of two weeks Charles de Langlade died "and his remains were buried beside those of his father in the cemetery at Green Bay."

Pierre Grignon, Sr., was buried here in 1795, his son Pierre Grignon, Jr., in 1823, and Madame de Langlade in 1818. Domitelle de Langlade, her daughter, who was married first to Pierre Grignon in 1778 when but 13 years of age, and second, to Jean B. Landevine, died about 1823 and was buried in the cemetery "at Green Bay," and many others of whom no record has been preserved. Augustin Grignon speaks of it as an "old cemetery in 1771." Graves were quite numerous and interments continued to be made in this old cemetery until the plat of Astor was laid out in 1835. After this, from time to time, as the property round about was built upon, numbers of bodies were removed to the new Catholic cemetery at Allouez (then called Shantytown); others to Baird's park then acemetery, where many remain to this day.

Bodies Under Pavement.

In making the excavations for water mains on Adams-st. in 1886-7, a number of bodies were disinterred, between the north line of Crooks-st. and Chicago-st., and were reinterred in the street, but beyond future disturbance. Many bodies still lie under the pavement of Adams-st., and the abutting lawns and gardens, where it is hoped they may rest in peace until "The mighty Angel shall come down, and set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and sound the trumpet of the resurrection."

The little church or chapel was situated south of the cemetery, and it is said that Madame Langevine donated an acre of land for "church purposes," but we have no exact description of its location.

During the summer of 1823 Father Gabriel Richard, curate of Detroit and vicar general of the Northwest, visited Green Bay. He solemnized a few marriages and performed some baptisms. He also arranged for the building of a church, which was commenced the same year under the supervision of Father Stephen Badin, and so far completed before winter set in that services were held in the building. (French Hist. Brown Co. p. 70).

Miss French also says "The first church in Green Bay was built in 1823 on the de Langlade property at a point near the old Bank building (the Bank building faced Chicago-st. and extended across the entire block from Washington to Adams-st.—It was burned in 1880.) Madame Langevine having donated an acre of ground for that purpose."

Missionary Came Twice Yearly.

Mrs. Henry S. Baird tells us that when she came to "The Bay" in 1824 "A little Roman Catholic chapel occupied the eastern corner of the site where the old Bank building was placed, and east of this was the graveyard, taking in about a square. Graves were at one time underlying Adams-st." (Hist. Col. vol. 9, 321.)

Mr. Ellis, speaking of the venerable Father Badin says, "That for several years this hard-working, zealous, self-denying missionary visited the Bay: the children, and those of years as well, were assembled, ranged on each side of the center of the old log church ....the old Father, having a space to walk up and down, would commence repeating the lesson, obliging them to repeat after him for half a day at a time, and woe to the luckless wight who failed of committing his task."

The good Father visited Green Bay semi-annually, remaining for two weeks at a time. (Hist. Col. vol. 7, 230-31.)

In 1826 Father Badin was succeeded by Father Fauvel, Friar Fau.—as he was sometimes called. He taught school and held services in the little chapel, until its destruction by fire in 1828 or 1829.

Borrowed Seine from Priest.

When Judge Morgan L. Martin came to "the Bay" in 1827 he says there had been a school for two or three years previous but there was none when he arrived. That shortly after Father Fauval started a school in a small log house near where the waterworks pumping station now is, and that this was used as a chapel also. Judge Martin further says, "I attended service but once a few months after he came. I went in, walked up to the altar, and in a whisper told him I would like to borrow his seine. He replied in the same tone that I could have it but must return it by a certain hour, when he would be through with his service and would want to use it himself. This chapel was the only church in Green Bay at that time."

Ostensorium Found

Father Fauvel soon fell from favor with the superior officers of the church. Fathers Mazzuchelli and Badin would not recognize him as a priest. At first the people favored Fauvel who claimed the chapel as his own. Finally he lost popular support, the chapel and school were closed and he was obliged to leave. He roomed in the building and through carelessness, set fire to it and it was entirely destroyed. The famous Ostensorium presented by Nicholas Perrot in 1686, to the Mission of St. Francis Xavier at the Rapids Des Peres, said to have been found on the De Langlade-Grignon property in 1802 near the St. Paul station and long in the possession of Mrs. Grignon. When the Mission was attacked and burned by the Indians about 1689 the priests in their flight took it with them and buried it where it was found—expecting probably to recover it later.

After the building of the church in 1823, it was used by Father Badin in the services held there. When the Father finally left Green Bay he took it with hi into St. Ann's Detroit. Discovered there by Father Bonduel in 1858, it was redeemed by him for $26 and brought back to Green Bay. It belongs to the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay—but is temporarily deposited, for safe keeping in the State Historical Museum at Madison.